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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: promoting full employment and decent work for all

Statement submitted by Christian Children's Fund and School Sisters of Notre Dame, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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Statement

1. Despite decades of efforts by national governments, international agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), 1 billion children continue to live in conditions of poverty and vulnerability. The families of these children, caught in the trap of poverty, often have no alternative but to rely on their children's labour to ensure their survival. The sad reality is that the sacrifice of these children's education and childhood only ensures continued poverty for the children, their families, and their communities. Significantly reducing the incidence of hazardous and exploitative child labour and ensuring that all children have access to quality education are essential to guaranteeing full employment and decent work for all, as well as to breaking the cycle of poverty.

2. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), an estimated 218 million children worldwide, between age five and 17, engage in some form of child labour. Of these children, an estimated 126 million engage in illegal, hazardous, or exploitative child labour. Approximately 8 million children are engaged in the worst forms of child labour.

3. Many children leave their communities in search of work; this includes travelling from rural to urban areas or to different countries within the same region, or sometimes even overseas. There, they may be exploited sexually, marginalized, and deprived of basic human rights.

4. The risk of child labour is not always equally distributed — often it is the poorest, most marginalized children who are at greatest risk of engaging in dangerous labour as a means of survival.

5. While both boys and girls engage in hazardous work in order to supplement their family's income, girls often sacrifice their education so that they may work to pay for a male sibling to attend school.

"We work so that the boys can go to school." - Adolescent girl, village near Kabala, Sierra Leone.

6. Hidden away, some children work as domestic servants. These children, most often girls, are vulnerable to trafficking, exploitation, and physical and sexual abuse. Child domestic workers as young as five often work 12-18 hours per day to supplement their families' income. The long hours and working conditions deprive them of their childhood, education and exclude them from society.

7. An estimated 1.2 million children under the age of 18 are trafficked throughout the world. Boys are primarily trafficked to work in the agricultural sector and young girls are largely trafficked to work in the commercial sex industry and domestic servitude. Children engaged in armed forces and armed groups are often forced to work as combatants, messengers, porters, cooks, or sexual slaves.

8. While many children contribute to their family's household in ways that allows them to engage in productive childhood activities, there are many children who are exploited. Many child labourers work for little pay and lack access to basic education, healthcare and other social services. It is no coincidence that children who work long hours under hazardous conditions lack the opportunity to attend school. Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have the right to be protected from performing any work that is likely to exclude them from accessing education.

"My sister got married and I had to take over her household work, so I had to leave school. My father told me, 'Now that your sister is married, how can you go to school? Graze the cattle during daytime and at night you can study at home." – Adolescent girl, Oruro, Bolivia

9. Given the poverty faced by millions of families around the world, children often have no choice but to share in familial responsibilities; and children, well aware of the poverty in which they live, sometimes express fulfilment from their work, as it allows them to contribute to their family's survival.

10. Reducing the incidence of child labour around the world requires more than removing children from hazardous or exploitative work. Ending child labour entails long-term community-based development and strengthening child

protection mechanisms at the family, community, and societal levels. Parents must have access to decent work or alternative income generation schemes so they no longer depend on their children's income for survival, and children must be provided with access to quality education.

11. Education is vital to the elimination of child labour. While progress has been made over the past decade in getting more children into school, the pace remains far too slow. Furthermore, the poor quality of some education causes high dropout and repetition rates.

12. Meaningful, quality education which enables the full development of the human person promotes social and economic development. Education which advances understanding, tolerance and respect for human rights protects children from exploitation. Education which encourages the development of the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for all persons to participate effectively in their communities, leads to full employment and decent work for all and can put an end to child labor.

13. The promotion of education for children contributes to the elimination of child labor and to full employment. Education for children leads to the longer term outcome of decent work for adults. In the context of child labor, it is important to ensure that education be a protective environment that includes ongoing monitoring of risks, as well as action to address those risks.

14. Many NGOs working around the world have found that, coupled with other important activities, providing children with formal, non-formal, vocational education and literacy training reduces the incidence of exploitative child labor. Governments, such as the United States of America, Germany, Italy, Spain and Canada, have been leaders in the international effort to combat exploitative child labor by funding technical assistance programs – implemented by ILO-IPEC and NGOs – that promote education for current and former child laborers.

Recommendations

15. **Child labour perpetuates the cycle of poverty and low-wage earning as adults, limits educational opportunities and, in some cases, drives down adult wages. In order to break the cycle of poverty and promote decent work for all, efforts must be taken to ensure that children are not engaged in hazardous work and that all children have access to education. This includes:**

- **Making education a priority and recognizing the key role it plays in eradicating poverty, putting an end to child labour, and creating full employment and decent work for all.**
- **Ensuring that all children have access to quality education, including early childhood development programs, primary school, secondary school and vocational programs.**
- **Promoting national labour law enforcement, especially adherence to ILO Convention 182 and ILO Convention 138.**
- **Promoting national education policies and strengthening education systems in order to prevent children from engaging in hazardous labour and that are more responsive to the needs of children who leave hazardous work.**
- **Promoting social safety nets for vulnerable children, so that they need not resort to child labour.**
- **Providing rehabilitation, catch-up education and psycho-social support for children who have exited exploitative or hazardous labour.**
- **Strengthening mechanisms at multiple levels for monitoring, reporting, and addressing exploitative labour practices, and the forms of abuse and exploitation that lead children into dangerous labour situations.**

- **Establishing community based child labour monitoring and service referral systems or committees that mobilize community members in identifying children who are working or at risk of working in hazardous activities, and then refer children and parents to social services available in their community.**

- **Involving children and youth, in a meaningful way, in the development and evaluation of child-targeted education, skills training, or employment programs.**

- **Advocacy on child-friendly policies and implementation mechanisms that discourage children's participation in exploitative labour and promote access to education.**

- **Ensuring that the conditions and wages of adult workers are improved. Improvements in the conditions of adult workers results in the decline of child labour, since parents can 'afford' to take their children out of the labour force.**

- **Providing parents of child labourers and children vulnerable to entering work with access to alternative generating income opportunities or vocational and skills training, so that they no longer depend on the income of their children for survival.**

Note:

Statement supported by the following non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council: Dominican Leadership Conference, International Council of Jewish Women, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation, Peace Worldwide, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namor and Soroptimist International.